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Vietnam Baloney

Two items in the news recently are a reminder of how much baloney Americans have been fed about South Vietnam. (1) President Thieu has suspended popular elections of hamlet chiefs—a tradition reaching back further than American democracy. (2) The South Vietnamese government has sentenced or fined 48 newspaper and magazine publishers for violating the press law. The press law may be summarized as: Don't Print Anything Unfavorable to the Government.

Like a slice of baloney, the issue has two sides. Liberals note how these actions discredit a part of the so-called American objectives in Vietnam. But, really, who has ever studied the subject and concluded that western democracy is possible in Southeast Asia, anyway? From the days of John Foster Dulles (1954) to this day, American policy has not been based on the realities in Southeast Asia; it

has been based purely on the myths of a proud, idealistic but uninformed American people and the realities of the next American election.

The one hopeful aspect is that this terrible, tragic absurdity is bound to end. If Senator McGovern makes the race close enough (he probably will not) before November, President Nixon can dump his Vietnam policy as readily as he did his old China policy. If President Nixon wins by a large majority (which seems likely) he won't face the necessity of winning another election. He can then do what Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) estimates have implied, and the few scholars of the subject have advised: Get out of a place we know very little about. In 18 years the United States has not changed the character of the Vietnam war; it has simply escalated the consequences.